DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 375 788 HE 027 887

TITLE	Quality Counts: Setting Expectations for Higher Education...and Making Them Count.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY	Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA.
PUB DATE	[94]
NOTE	13p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Education Commission of the States, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; *College Outcomes Assessment; Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; *Educational Quality; Government Role; *Higher Education; Policy Formation; Political Influences; *State Government
IDENTIFIERS	*Education Commission of the States CO

ABSTRACT

In 1994-95, the Education Commission of the States plans to focus on quality in higher education--quality that reflects the changing needs of society; quality that shows in the performance of all colleges, universities, and community colleges; and quality that counts for parents and students. The Commission will examine what Americans need and should expect from higher education, and how state policies can shape and support a comprehensive postsecondary system that best meets these needs and expectations. Achieving a quality higher education system calls for a broad constituent-based concept of quality, high expectations, new ways to measure and monitor results, and a supportive policy environment. The Commission's agenda includes: (1) generating widespread public discussion and understanding of what quality means to various constituents and why it matters; (2) helping develop the political leadership necessary to create and support diverse, high-quality institutions of higher education; (3) exploring and helping develop ways to enhance the options available to students and to increase their ability to progress through the higher education system and into the workplace at a faster rate; and (4) helping college and university leaders engage students, faculty, and campus officials in using their resources to meet the needs of communities, states, and the nation. (JDD)

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QUALITY COUNTS

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setting expectations for higher education

. . . and making them count

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"IN HELPING MY OWN CHILDREN choose colleges, I found that the only measure available for institutional *quality* is how difficult it is to be admitted. We have lost the real meaning of *quality* higher education if all that matters is how hard it is for students to get in, not what education they receive or what the results are.

— Roy Romer, governor of Colorado, 1994-95 ECS chairman, May 1994"

In 1994-95, the Education Commission of the States (ECS), under the chairmanship of Colorado Governor Roy Romer, will focus on quality in higher education — quality that reflects the changing needs of society; quality that shows in the performance of all colleges, universities and community colleges; quality that counts for parents and students. Under Romer's leadership, ECS will raise tough issues about what Americans need and should expect from higher education, and about how state policies can shape and support a comprehensive postsecondary system that best meets these needs and expectations.

The American higher education system has long been recognized as one of the best in the world. This reputation is based on excellence in research, graduate education and other areas and on the diverse opportunities provided by our colleges, universities and community colleges. The system has been distinctive in serving, through varied approaches, a much higher proportion of the population than other nations' higher education systems.

But reputation is not enough to guarantee results at a time when needs and expectations are rising. Recent polls show that Americans worry about whether they and their children will have access to — and be able to afford — the education that will open doors to a secure future. They are concerned about whether the programs provided by America's colleges and universities will indeed give them the tools they need to succeed. And they have no tangible, reliable way to rate the quality of their higher education institutions.

Neither individuals nor the broader society can afford to be indifferent to concerns about the quality of our higher education institutions, including concerns about access, affordability and the effectiveness of programs. Nor can they allow quality to be defined solely in terms of academic studies that are isolated from the rapidly changing world in which knowledge and skills must be applied.

> *AS A STUDENT, I WOULD ASK: IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK THAT I BE able to take the courses necessary to graduate in four years? Is it too much to ask that professors be available to students during office hours for extra assistance? Is it too much to ask that tuition increases be gradual and predictable?*
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> — Rhian Evans, student regent, Arizona, *Reports on Higher Education in the West*, March 1994, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education

Making "quality count" will affect higher education and the public in different ways.

Students and parents count on higher education to provide them with the knowledge and skills to prepare for the future. But, too often, students face large classes, disjointed curricula and ineffective teaching; colleges and universities raise tuition costs and fees with no corresponding increase in quality; state and federal financial aid does not rise in tandem with college costs; and the growing diversity in the student population is not reflected in the graduates or faculty of higher education institutions.

Legislators, governors and other policymakers struggle to set directions and goals for higher education that are consistent with state priorities and dedicated to the best use of taxpayers' money. But, too many colleges and universities have chosen to respond to fiscal constraints by limiting enrollments rather than reallocating and using resources more effectively.

Communities expect higher education to help students and society understand public problems and contribute to solutions. But, much of higher education seems detached and disinterested rather than engaged in finding solutions to problems such as violence, health care and social decay in their communities.

Businesses depend on higher education for knowledgeable, well-trained workers in order to be competitive. But, the academic values that higher education reflects too often are defined without any reference to student preparation for and placement in the workforce.

Public leaders and many educators recognize that success in reforming K-12 education will be severely limited unless higher education becomes more involved in meeting goals for education improvement at all levels. But, colleges and universities have been slow to support K-12 changes and reflect these in entrance requirements, instructional methods or preparation of teachers.

Faculty members care deeply about students and teaching. But often universities and academic disciplines base rewards and advancement on publication and research, rather than on quality of teaching.

The issue of quality in higher education is complex because there is no one quality problem and no single solution. Institutional priorities, traditional ways of doing business and a piecemeal approach to state policymaking all have contributed to the problems we face. We need to rethink and improve the way higher education operates in order to provide quality education within a rapidly changing social, economic and technological environment.

What Does Quality Involve?

Making quality count will require all members of the public to **expect** more and **demand** more from higher education. Setting high expectations for students and institutions is just as important to improving learning in colleges, universities and community colleges as it is in elementary/ secondary schools. Individuals and business and government leaders must specify clear standards of performance for our colleges, universities and community colleges if we are to achieve high-quality institutions of higher education.

A quality higher education today must meet the needs of a *diverse population* of youth and adults through *more effective education practices* and increased opportunities for teaching and learning augmenting traditional classroom practices. A quality higher education system must encompass *many types of institutions and settings* — urban commuter campuses, diverse programs at community colleges, workplace and community learning centers, telecommunications and interactive computer-based learning, as well as liberal arts colleges and research universities. A quality higher education must enable all populations to have *equal access* to the type of higher education that best meets individual needs. And, a quality education must mean greater attention to *efficiency and affordability* throughout the postsecondary system.

> *"A DISTURBING AND DANGEROUS MISMATCH EXISTS BETWEEN what American society needs of higher education and what it is receiving. The American imperative for the 21st century is that society must hold higher education to much higher expectations or risk national decline."*
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> — *An American Imperative: Higher Expectations for Higher Education,* Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993

Achieving these objectives demands:

A broad, constituent-based concept of quality higher education that responds to the needs of students, employers, political leaders and the public at large, as well as needs of institutions.

High expectations for the performance of colleges, universities and community colleges relative to the needs of the different constituencies.

New ways to measure and monitor the results of higher education consistent with this broad concept of quality.

A supportive policy environment that encourages higher education to respond to this agenda built around quality.

How Will We Make "Quality Count"?

Over the next year, ECS, under the leadership of Colorado Governor Roy Romer, 1994-95 ECS chairman, will address what quality in higher education means and what it will take to make quality count for more Americans. Our agenda has several components.

Generate widespread public discussion and understanding of what quality means to various constituents and why it matters.

To accomplish this, ECS will:

- Organize regional focus groups to find out what the public — students, business and community leaders, and others — wants and expects from higher education, and disseminate this information.
- Convene governors, legislators, higher education officials, business leaders and others both nationally and within states to debate and define what quality in higher education means to different people.

Help develop the political leadership necessary to create and support diverse, high-quality institutions of higher education.

- Assist state and institutional leaders in establishing high, clear expectations for the performance of colleges, universities and community colleges.
- Help state and institutional leaders develop better and clearer forms of public accountability, including ways to measure and report on the quality of education provided.
- Work with organizations (such as the National Policy Board for Higher Education Institutional Accreditation) to make sure standards for institutional performance reflect quality.

- Promote new approaches in state and institutional policy that provide incentives for colleges, universities and community colleges to meet goals for increased quality and productivity.

- Support state leaders in examining their state's higher education system in order to elevate their understanding of the role of state policy in promoting quality higher education.

Explore and help develop ways to enhance the options available to students and to increase their ability to progress through the higher education system and into the workplace at a faster rate.

Toward this end, ECS will:

- Help states and institutions design and structure accelerated and innovative degree programs that move students quickly to degree attainment and integrate high school, workplace and higher education experience.

- Work with higher education leaders to identify strategies to improve student preparation for the workplace and to provide opportunities for people to move more easily in and out of the higher education system as their personal and job needs change.

- Collaborate with and expand the work of states and institutions in defining the proficiencies necessary for college-level work and other measures of preparation and performance.

Help college and university leaders engage students, faculty and campus officials in using their resources to meet the needs of communities, states and the nation.

To strengthen engagement in society, ECS will:

- Develop new models of state and institutional policies that more clearly focus resources on meeting the needs of society through teaching, research, public service and other activities of colleges, universities and community colleges.
- Help states expand opportunities for students to learn through community service by expanding Campus Compact, the ECS-sponsored project for public and community service.
- Connect higher education to the efforts and partnerships necessary to stimulate and sustain education improvement at all levels, especially the K-12 education reform movement.

What Will We Accomplish?

The ECS "Quality Counts" agenda will involve the public in discussions of what individuals and communities need and expect from their colleges, universities and community colleges.

Our efforts will help state policymakers, business leaders and others understand the importance of higher education and build the leadership and support necessary to prepare higher education to meet the changing needs of society now and in the future.

Our activities will bring greater clarity and concreteness to discussions about how to measure student and institutional performance. They will help restore teaching to its rightful place in higher education's priorities.

And our work will bring higher education into the effort to reform our nation's education system, working in partnership with schools, school districts and states.

None of these initiatives alone will guarantee quality. But together they can ensure progress and build upon existing efforts to improve access, equity and student choice, all of which must continue to be part of the definition of quality in American higher education. Only a concerted effort by all the parties involved can build the understanding, support and policies necessary to ensure the continued preeminence of American higher education in a rapidly changing world. It is not enough for our higher education institutions to *have been* the best. We must make sure the American higher education system *continues to be* the best in the world.

"*I'M CONCERNED THAT . . . HIGHER EDUCATION'S HISTORIC commitment to service seems to have diminished. I'm troubled that many now view the campus as a place where professors get tenured and students get credentialed; the overall efforts of the academy are not considered to be at the vital center of the nation's work. And what I find most disturbing is the growing feeling . . . that higher education is a private benefit, not a public good.*"

— Ernest L. Boyer, president, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; 1994 ECS Conant Award Recipient, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 9, 1994

Colorado Governor Roy Romer is 1994-95 chairman of the Education Commission of the States.

Governor of Colorado since 1986, he has emphasized improving the quality of the Colorado education system. He helped draft and successfully pushed a charter schools bill through the legislature, making Colorado one of only eight states to have such legislation. He has been a leader both nationally and in Colorado for the development of academic standards for public schools.

Nationally, Romer served as first chairman of the National Education Goals Panel, where he helped develop the nation's first education report card. He also served as 1992-93 chairman of the National Governors' Association and as 1991-92 chairman of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing.

Prior to being elected governor, Romer served as the Colorado state treasurer and was a member of both the Colorado House and Senate. He received a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from Colorado State University, a law degree from the University of Colorado and studied ethics at Yale University. He is married and has seven children.

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Supported in part through a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed are those of ECS and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Trusts.